



The Letterpress Project

Author and Illustrator E-Interviews

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this series of Letterpress Project e-interviews that we are undertaking over the coming months. The Letterpress Project is a not-for-profit initiative that exists to promote the value and pleasures of the physical book and we are keen to get the thoughts of authors and book illustrators about their own influences, experiences and love of books. We are happy for you to make your answers as long or as brief as you are comfortable with and we will undertake not to edit or paraphrase any of your comments without your explicit permission.

Q1. What are your earliest memories of books and reading? For example, did you have a favourite or inspirational book?

My earliest memories of books are the bedtime stories with my dad. He was a magical storyteller and I can remember 'getting lost' in his versions of *Wind in the Willows*, *Black Beauty* and *Charlotte's Web*!

I would find it unbearable when he finally closed the book as it was getting late and like Oliver Twist would shout "More, more!"

Q2. What inspired you to become an author / illustrator?

Due to my early experiences in life being surrounded by wonderful storytelling at home and great teachers such as Mrs Jones at school, I always loved to 'tell a story'. -I clearly had the knack of telling a good yarn as it seemed the only time I got positive attention from peers. As a 'gentle' young boy I was bullied harshly and regularly, but my storytelling talent would often distract them for a while and it helped me gain some popularity amongst kinder peers.

I also loved to write and despite my terrible spelling ability and awful handwriting some of my early teachers recognised my creativity and gave me praise despite nearly needing an interpreter to decipher it on occasions.

So I knew I had it in me and have to say did dream that I would one day be published. That moment came when I spotted the artwork of a parent in the school where I was head teacher. Judith Blake (or Mrs Blake as she was then called!) blew me away with her drawing and painting skills. So I wrote a story and begged her to illustrate it. The rest is history when in 1999 *'If Only'* was published and since re published by Red Robin Books!

Q3. For you, what makes a successful book or illustration?

It is so hard to define a successful book as like artwork some engage with and love it, whilst others find it most unappealing. So I suppose a good book is one that the reader hates to put down and enjoys it so much that they do not want it to end. That happens to me often and did recently with two books *When God was a Rabbit* by Sarah Winman, and *Howards End is on the Landing* by Susan Hill.

I have to say that I get very frustrated these days when so many published children's books (one of my passions) these days seem to lack any storyline at all. Hence the logo of Red Robin books my publisher is 'Where story matters'.

Q4. Do you have a specific audience in mind when you write your books / plan your illustrations?

When I began writing I had children aged 0 to 6 years in mind.

I imagined and hoped that they would be 'Read Aloud' books children who loved a story.

However, I have since found that children of all ages enjoy them and adults too!

I recently featured at a Folk Festival in Wiltshire where I told stories in a wonderful tent. To my surprise the audience in the second session of the day were largely adults who had heard that a great story was available!

Q5. What future do you think the physical book has? For example, do you think the electronic book will replace the physical book?

Technology is the future and it is here to stay. It brings with it many amazing things but has aspects that sadden me deeply, mostly the erosion of personal skills and vital interaction. Nevertheless I will fight to my dying day to promote the importance of the 'physicality of a book.

Everyone on this earth should have the chance to select a book from a shelf, smell the paper and ink, caress the cover and explore the font before you even get to read it!

Nothing replaces that moment and life-long readers are born from the unique multi- sensory experience of choosing a book.

Q6. Are you a book collector? Is there a special book you'd love to own?

I am a book collector of fiction and non- fiction.

I would love to own a first edition of *Cider with Rosie* or *Wind in the Willows*.

Thank you very much for taking time to do this for us. We will advise you when we publish it on the website - www.letterpressproject.co.uk. Please return the completed interview to:

Karen Argent

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